

# ASIAN *affairs*

FOCUS: NAMDHARI MOVEMENT

## ***A Crusader for Peace and Social Justice***







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The Namdhari Movement was at the forefront of the resistance movement, providing the inspiration behind the principles used so effectively against foreign colonial rule. In this issue we feature a special look at the current work being carried out by the Namdhari movement, and especially the movement's spiritual leader Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji. Through his work in the community encouraging spiritual enlightenment through education, music, meditation and clean living, Gerrard Thorpe argues that what the politics of the subcontinent needs is less politics and more ethics. Mr. Parkash Singh Badal, Chief Minister of Punjab along with Ajit Singh, Surinder Singh and Avtar Singh seeks the blessings of Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji at Bhaini Sahib.

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Harish Khare takes a look at the Indian political scene in the light of the decline of the United Front government and in anticipation of the coming general election, giving an invaluable insight into how the next election is likely to be fought and which groups are likely to do well.

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In this month's issue Kavita Nagpal reports from Avignon in France on its annual festival of theatre, dance and music the Festival d'Avignon. Originally inspired by the visionary poet Jean Vilar's dream of bringing together creative forces following the second world war, the festival has gone on to become the most important theatre event in Europe. We also feature a look at a renaissance in traditional dance forms with Sreeradha Datta, who looks at how a rediscovery of the past is leading to the development of exciting and innovative new dance forms and styles.



# ASIAN affairs

Number 15

January 1998

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**Cover**

Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji,  
spiritual leader of the Namdhari Sikhs.

## Editorial:

**A**S THE NEW YEAR dawns, curious developments, which may be construed as optimistic signals of cooperation and rapprochement between the nations and peoples, are taking place the world over. These signals, let us hope, shall herald a new phase of peaceful co-existence in this strife-torn universe.

Across the continents, interesting events, indicating the formation of new and strategic alliances, are taking place. The enemy images built up over decades are fading away. In Asia, the prominent regional power, China, is undergoing gradual structural changes internally. At the external level, there are indications of a new bilateral cooperation between China and the US. The recent meeting between Chinese President Jiang Zemin and US President Bill Clinton seems to have broken fresh ground in the bilateral relations between the two countries, the apprehensions of sceptics notwithstanding. America's comprehensive agenda of 'engagement with China,' as Bill Clinton defined it during the recent summit meeting between the two heads of state, is going to have enormous impact on the current strategic alliances in the region. In this issue, we present an analysis of the changing Sino-US relationship. The analysis concludes that the agreement between the two countries not only to hold regular meetings but also to work towards a constructive strategic partnership, could narrow down differences of opinion on many contentious issues between the two countries significantly.

In India, some hectic political activity is heating up the political scene in view of the forthcoming parliamentary elections. The fall of the United Front government in India, necessitating fresh elections on the country within a span of two years, has raised serious debate about the functioning of political party system in India. India, a vibrant democracy which is the largest in the world, has assimilated the democratic spirit within her system. The country's tryst with democracy over the last fifty years bears testimony to this fact. However, the plurality of the country in terms of cultures, languages, regions and religions has meant that the trend of one party rule in the governance of the country has started to be questioned. As a consequence of this, the assertions of regional political parties are being seen as a new challenge to the Indian political system. It is also being argued that the regional political parties' capacity to act as coherent political formations for governance is highly doubtful. The fall of the United Front government at the centre is cited as an illustration supporting this argument. The crux of the matter, as argued by noted Indian columnist and analyst Mr Harish Khare in this issue, is that the challenge to the Indian electorate is to blend representativeness in its ruling arrangement along with coherence in governance. He is of the opinion that the Indian voter is of the calibre to judge the claims of leaders and political parties fairly and competently in voting them in or out of power.

Away from the strategic mumbo-Jumbo and summaries of political contests, Kavita Nagpal takes us to Avignon in France where she presents us with some interesting glimpses of the *Festival d'Avignon*. The close interaction of artists, musicians and dancers from diverse cultural and social backgrounds is indeed a unique and interesting event. The convergence of diverse social groups, sharing their creative experiences to reflect the spirit of human solidarity holds the only guarantee for building a world free of conflict.

**Riyaz Punjabi, Editor**

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January 1998



## O.I.C. – Indian delegates not invited?

SIR – Further to our letter of 12th December last year we would like to bring your attention to some discrepancies between the English and the Urdu versions of the Tehran Declaration as reported by the Pakistan newspaper *The Daily Jang*, London, of 12th December 1997.

It will be noted that the English and the Urdu versions of the declaration relating to the issue of Kashmir contradict each other. In the English report, the 55 O.I.C. members are referred to as having 'pledged their full support to the People of the Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir', whilst in the Urdu version, they are quoted as 'having directed India to grant to the People of Jammu and Kashmir their right of self-determination under UN Resolutions'.

We would like to respectfully point out that, as far as the Kashmir situation is concerned, the O.I.C. would appear to have been very much misled at the Confer-

ence by the Pakistan delegation. The subsequent contradictory reporting of the Tehran Declaration through their media in the Urdu and the English languages can only be described as a further indication of their desire to create confusion among those people with regard to the stand of the O.I.C. on the Kashmir issue will be totally at odds with the truth of this situation, as will that of those of the International Community who do not have any knowledge of Urdu.

May we be permitted to say that this approach by the Pakistani Authorities is, to say the least, dishonest, as they are taking undue advantage of their friends, in the name of Islam – and we understand that this is not the first occasion on which they have done so. Since the creation of Pakistan, the Authorities of that country have, in order to serve their own self-interest, constantly misled not only their own people, but also the people of Kashmir and their friends in the International Community, in particular

those in Muslim countries, regarding the nature and the history of the Kashmir dispute.

As to the nature of the Kashmir dispute – this is, and always has been, connected to the partition of India in 1947 on the basis of Islam. Its final settlement or conclusion is to be seen in that context only.

Jammu and Kashmir  
Peace Committee  
Hove, UK

## Labour support

SIR – I would like to draw your attention to the fact that following the May election in the UK there are now four Labour MPs publicly advocating their support for a group purporting to oppose Human Rights violations in Punjab. This group has been connected with Khalistani terrorists who have been responsible for the murder of over 25,000 ordinary people in the Punjab.

In response to a letter sent to the Labour MP for Reading West Mr Martin Salter criticising his attendance at the HYDE Park Rally held on June 8th 1997, Mr Salter's reply (10th November 1997), is as follows and may be of interest to your readers:

'My sole purpose (in attending the Rally) was to emphasise the commitment of the Labour Party to supporting Human Rights issues in the Punjab and elsewhere.

You will be aware that Human Rights violations in the Punjab have been well documented by respectable and impartial organisations

such as Amnesty International. I trust you are not suggesting that abuses of Human Rights in India should be ignored.

As a member of the All-Party Human Rights Group I shall be supporting the forthcoming requests made by the group and Amnesty for a delegation to visit the Punjab to investigate Human Rights abuses. If there is nothing to hide then presumably the Indian government will not continue to prevent independent investigation of the situation?

For the record I have never supported or opposed the Khalistani demands for a separatist state'.

S S Singh, Indian  
Workers' Association  
Reading, UK

## Democratic order

SIR – I read with interest your focus on democratic institutions in Asia. I find myself agreeing with the view expressed in the article by Riyaz Punjabi, that whilst we may complain about our political systems, the ability to do this in fact shows that progress has been made in terms of both the functioning of the political systems and the politicians themselves.

All the while that we avoid military intervention this is in itself a sign that democracy is strong and functioning. Disagreement is a natural part of human life. Dictatorship shows an inability to deal with disagreement.

V Chana, Bombay, India

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# The Need for Spiritual Leadership

By Gerrard Thorpe

**T**HE SMALL village of Bhaini Sahib in the Punjab, the birthplace of the Namdhari Sikh movement, lies in an area which has over the centuries gone through turbulent episodes in its history. Located in the Punjab, it is in an area near the boundaries where India meets Pakistan and China. However, throughout its recent history the region has been the scene of much unrest and escalating tension which continues to destabilise the region.

The region has become the focus of tension between India and Pakistan, a sorry fact which is nowhere better demonstrated than by the turmoil which continues to affect Kashmir. Added to this the area also suffers from conflict between international political and monetary forces vying for influence in the region, the worrying development of a regional nuclear arms race,

*The tradition of religious involvement or guidance in the running of the nation-state has not proved to be unusual in Asia. In South Asia this has often taken the form of religious intolerance, extremism or even calls for separatism*

sporadic sectarian violence and religious tension.

The Sikh religion evolved against a background of political and religious conflict and this is evident in the great emphasis placed on the importance of toleration. The Sikh movement originally developed against a background of Hindu-Moslem conflict. Reflecting the need to maintain fairness, the Sikh holy book, the *Adi Granth Sahib*, included both Hindu and Islamic verses to reflect the superiority of humanity over religion.

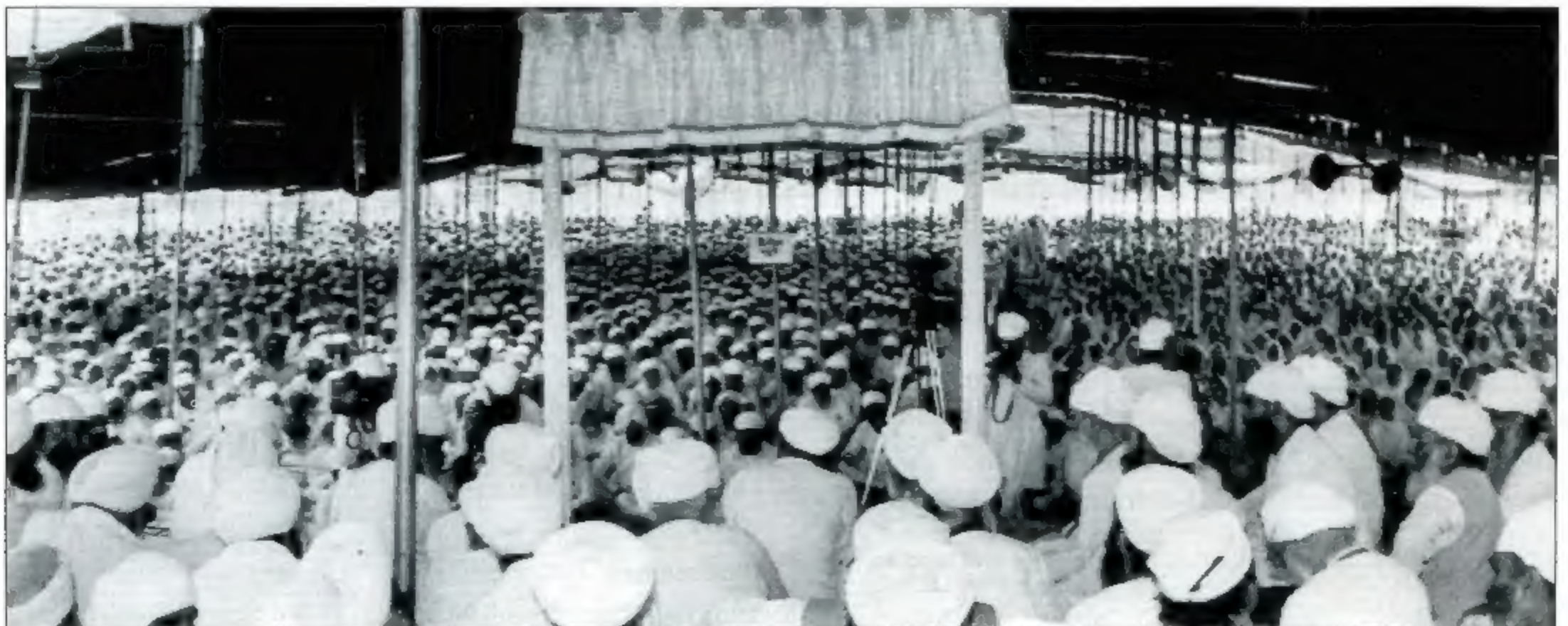
During the colonial period the Sikh's conciliatory skills were pitted against colonial might, with the Namdhari Sikhs playing a significant role in the independence movement. The role they

played was one of developing a method of principled and effective resistance to colonial rule. By steadfastly maintaining the importance of non-violence throughout, the Namdhari movement has adhered to the tradition advocated by Guru Nanak.

Through the guidance of successive Gurus and the social activities it organises, the Namdhari Sikh movement has played an increasingly active part in promoting an alternative to the status quo and finding a framework which allows for peaceful social development.

Whilst in the West religion has often played only a very minor or token role in politics, the tradition of religious involvement or guidance in the running

A scene at the Bhaini Sahib Hola Mela held in XXXXXXX on 18th October 1997.  
Photo: Nishan Singh





of the nation-state has not proved to be unusual in Asia. However, in South Asia this has often taken the form of religious intolerance, extremism or even calls for separatism, a trend which the Namdhari movement has not followed.

The political strife which has sadly afflicted the region has had a profound effect at all levels of society. However, through their expanding agenda of activities the Namdhari Sikhs are contributing to the process of social regeneration in an active manner. Rebuilding the very fabric of society through cultural activities such as the revival of musical traditions, the practical message behind such moves is two-fold. Firstly, through reviving these traditions the Namdhari Sikhs present an alternative to the pervasive influence of Western culture by advocating a way of life in which the cultural diversity and richness of the past is explored and continued as a path towards future development.

Secondly, by playing a practical role within the community, the Namdhari movement also acknowledges the need for improving people's actual lives and living standards rather than concentrating on abstract power-struggles.

Pandit Ravi Shanker meeting Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji



Through its emphasis on education and the revival of an intrinsic cultural heritage, it provides a set of goals for a generation of bewildered youth besieged with the temptations and decadence of nihilistic post-modern consumerism. At a time when in the West there is growing acknowledgement of the need to counter the social symptoms of stress, the Namdhari movement's emphasis on Yoga, meditation and spiritual enlightenment form part of a whole style of living which is tirelessly exemplified by the present guru, Satguru Jagjit Singh. Rising early every morning to offer guidance to his followers, he leads by example through leading a principled, simple life.

Indeed, there has not been a time in

India's post-independence history when the need for public and private morality has been more needed, when those in public office are again and again brought before the country on corruption charges, with the list of names sounding like a 'Who's Who' of the subcontinent. What is most dangerous about this trend is that it leads to an undermining of faith in the country's leaders and the actual political system itself.

In the absence of true spiritual guidance within the political arena, it is the Namdhari movement which could once again prove to have an influential role to play. Today's politics lacks morality. But there are very real opportunities for morality to be introduced into the politics of the subcontinent through a new style of social activism; one which emphasises projects to promote social cohesion such as building community centres, and one which also stresses the importance of religious toleration. And it is in this area that the Namdhari movement are leading the way, with Satguru Jagjit Singh at the forefront.

The significance of practical measures have become important, and especially the development of musical traditions. Music is a form of communication which promotes harmony – an international language of the soul – and the use of music for spiritual purposes





Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji in conversation with the former Indian High Commissioner to London, Dr L. M. Singhvi.

is well-documented. From its use in inducing the ecstatic trances of the prophets in Jewish music to the chanting of poems or hymns of the Sufi tradition, the liturgical role of music is widely acknowledged. Music plays an important part in all Namdhari religious meetings and social functions, and traditional instruments are often used.

Another important area in which the Namdhari Sikhs play an active role is in the provision of community projects. Not only do these raise people's living standards, providing education and other social benefits, but they also improve people's lifestyles. In order to attempt to reverse the disillusionment felt by people towards their political leaders, people need to develop faith in themselves first and foremost. And this can only come through spiritual guidance playing a part in politics.

After fifty years of independence the secular political tradition has left the subcontinent with a democratic legacy, but this in itself is not enough. For the political system to mature it has to command people's respect and provide them with guidance. Social insecurity can lead easily to chaos and even anarchy, and the need to counter this insecurity is made more urgent by fears

such as those unleashed by the shocks to the financial markets which occurred at the end of last year. For a society based on faith in money lacks any real security or faith in itself. But the message taught by Satguru Jagjit Singh is that security can only be attained through a purification of the conscience.

The legacy which our children's generation is currently set to inherit is one of environmental destruction and looming catastrophe, where social decay, political corruption, massive military spending, regional instability, religious intolerance and social inequality are rife.

For the subcontinent to avert disaster, it must unite. And in order for it to unite common sense must prevail. If not, the region will remain embroiled in conflict. The way forward requires that those in positions of leadership have the courage and vision to let reason replace ego on the negotiating table.

The leaders of the past may no longer be able to offer guidance, but the lessons of the past need to be heed-

ed in order for the future to be built on firmer foundations. And it is for this reason that words of spiritual leadership should be heeded.

The need for ethics in politics is everywhere. At the end of last year India's highest civilian award – the Bharat Ratna – was awarded to A P J Abdul Kalam. Whilst he was awarded this national honour for his distinguished contributions at the forefront of scientific development, he is best known for his role in masterminding India's nuclear missile programme. The primary school student whose model of a Prithvi missile won first prize in a contest in Sikandrabad was taken to see the real missile being assembled. What kind of a message does this give when a weapon of mass destruction is presented as a source of national honour and pride?

A former Indian Prime Minister Vishwanath P Singh summed up the absurdity of the Indo-Pakistani arms race in a nutshell – "You can build one hundred primary schools for the price

of one tank." The need for real social justice has never been greater. For this reason the personal example set by Satguru Jagjit Singh is a shining example to all irrespective of religion, creed, culture or other divisions.

Where are the ethics present in the actions of multinational corporations

which operate according to a philosophy of maximising profit for immediate financial gain? Let the message and example set by Satguru Jagjit Singh lead us and act as a beacon of light, for real happiness and prosperity can only come through society harnessing the values of integrity, morality and truth.

● Gerrard Thorpe is a renowned historian and regular contributor to a number of political journals in the UK and USA.

*The lessons of the past need to be heeded in order for the future to be built on firmer foundations. And it is for this reason that words of spiritual leadership should be heeded.*



# A Great Voice From Good Punjab

By Yogandra Bali

**S**ATGURU Jagjit Singh Ji, the spiritual King of millions of white-robed warriors – the Namdhari Sikhs – became the great voice of good Punjab in Milwaukee in the United States of America on July 19, 1997. His presence in Milwaukee for the opening of the Fifth World Punjabi Conference was not merely a historic event for Sikhs in the United States but for Punjabi scholars and cultural and spiritual historians from many parts of the world including the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Canada, Thailand and Pakistan.

The University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee campus became the first university in the 20th century to host a World Punjabi Conference. The presence of the great spiritual king of the white-robed warrior Sikhs of India to bless the conference gave it a double significance. It also gave birth to an "international Punjabi wave" which is expected to sweep across many continental shores over days to come.

It was Satguru Jagjit Singh's opening blessing remark which earned him the acclaim of 'The great voice of good Punjab'. His message was directed especially to Punjabi NRIs settled in many countries across the world. He touched the hearts of the Milwaukee gathering when he said, "You lovers of Punjabi from all over, I revere you. You are the ones who have come out of Punjab and earned a great name for yourself. But first of all I would like to remember the Great Guru Nanak, because of whom Punjab is so good, is such a front runner. He manifested

*One recalls that the holy village of Sri Bhaini Sahib was the most feared place for the British colonial rulers and their local henchmen. The British feared the influence of the great Satgurus of the Namdhari Sikhs, who had waged war against the foreign rulers*



himself in every facet of Punjab and he raised the quality of life of us, the Punjabis".

The Satguru underlined that it was the great Guru Nanak who had provided the spiritual content of the written and spoken Punjabi word, in order that the spirit and goodness of Punjab could be communicated and spread.

In a way, Satguru Jagjit Singh was reflecting the spirit of Guru Nanak, who was among the great founding fathers of Punjabi culture and its ethos. The Satguru himself, and his millions of white-robed Sikh followers around the world, consider themselves to be the spiritual successors of Guru Nanak.

Lord Swraj Paul, Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji and a group of Namdhari Sikhs photographed outside the Houses of Parliament in London.

Interestingly, Satguru Jagjit Singh, who was born in the same week as Guru Nanak, celebrates the birthday of the First Sikh Guru as a great spiritual celebration but forbids his followers from celebrating his own birthday to remind them that he is against ritualism and pomp and show.

According to the Western calendar, Satguru Jagjit Singh was born on November 22, 1920 at Sri Bhaini Sahib, a great place of pilgrimage for both saints and revolutionaries alike.





Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji at a reception organised by Mr Thomas in his honour at the House of Lords, London.

According to the Indian calendar the date of birth goes according to the *tith*. This means that it stays on the same day in the Hindu calendar but changes according to the Christian calendar. For example, last year it was on November 11. Is it a coincidence that everything about the Namdhari Sikhs and their great spiritual king defies the accepted rituals and material laws of a material world?

To understand the social and spiritual significance of Satguru Jagjit Singh, one has to understand the entire revolutionary and spiritual culture he embodies. It would be neither sufficient nor adequate to simply say that he was brought up during such challenging times as the 'spiritual' prince of the Kookas, the Namdhari Sikhs known as white-robed warriors, who fought the might of the imperial British tooth and

nail. It would also not be enough to point out that he ascended the spiritual throne of the Namdhari Sikhs in 1959 and started an era of modernisation among the great freedom fighters who once boycotted everything British, including the railways, the post offices and the schools.

*To understand the social and spiritual significance of Satguru Jagjit Singh, one has to understand the entire revolutionary and spiritual culture he embodies.*

They were the great saint-soldier leaders of the Sikhs who initiated many of the revolutionary concepts of the Indian freedom struggle such as *Swadeshi*, civil disobedience and non-violent cooperation which were later

developed by the leaders of the Indian Freedom Movement like Gandhi and Nehru.

Looking back, one recalls that the holy village of Sri Bhaini Sahib was the most feared place for the British colonial rulers and their local henchmen. The British feared the influence of the great Satgurus of the Namdharis, the leaders of the Kooka Movement, who had waged war against the foreign rulers. The British had turned the great home of the Satgurus and Namdhari Sikh complex at Sri Bhaini Sahib into a virtual prison. The British colonial masters wanted to make it clear then that everyone and everything in Sri Bhaini Sahib was being watched by their police hawks. They thought that they could blow up the flame of freedom lit by the first Namdhari Sikh Guru, Satguru Ram Singh, by terror tactics. How mistaken they were? They did not realise that the baby Beant, born on



November 22, 1920 at the same Bhaini Sahib, would not only see the light of freedom come to India but was also destined to lead the Namdhari Sikh warriors to a new world of modernity, tempering science with spirituality and an era of forgiveness for the British, many of whom had to become great admirers and followers of the Satguru himself.

Born as the son of Satguru Pratap Singh, Beant was later named Jagjit Singh – the conqueror of the world. And since he ascended the Namdhari Throne on August 22, 1959, he has ever tried to conquer the world with love, peace, spiritual and physical cleanli-

ness and faith. Some call him the 'living Christ', some call him the Modern Messiah, there are others who see the 'Spirit of the Sikh Gurus' in him.

During the nearly four decades of his reign over the hearts of the Namdhari Sikhs, now spread over many countries of the World, the Satguru has, step by step, led them into modernity in the best tradition of the soldier-saints of Punjab. The Namdhari Sikh today is a byword for honesty, cleanliness, good conduct, hard work and great courage. But that is the reflection of only one of the changes brought in by the Satguru in the quality of life of his followers.

Modern educational and sports facilities in Namdhari institutions, radical social reforms, including marriages free from pomp and ostentation, abstention from drugs and intoxicants, living simple lives marked by high-thinking and high achievement, are among the norms infused into the Sikhs by their Satguru. At the same time, they have been encouraged to use and

excel in harnessing modern informatics such as computers and blaze new trails as sportsmen and musicians. All these are the reflections of the personality of the Satguru.

In order to take the message of good Punjab abroad, the Satguru has paid several visits to countries like Thailand, Hong Kong, Singapore, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia and other European and African countries and encouraged the setting up of Punjabi schools in countries other than India. He has been one of the greatest forces of motivation behind the organisation of the World Punjabi Conferences.

But when principles and faith is involved, he often baffles modern science when he asserts the superiority of faith and spiritualism. He himself underwent the world's most unique open heart surgery in Australia, insisting that no alcoholic antiseptics be used on his body and no hair on his body be shaved during the surgery along with no blood transfusions and male nurses only attending to him. It was a successful operation and all his conditions were complied with.

The Satguru's encouragement has led to a resurgence in the field of historical research and Punjabi literature. His patronage has also revived and resurrected many Punjabi folk, traditional and devotional festivals. In fact, as one of his devotees said, "The Satguru's life and work is a continuous celebration of the spirit of Punjab. He is the great voice from Good Punjab."

● Jogendra Bali is a renowned Indian social and religious commentator.

*During the nearly four decades of his reign over the hearts of the Namdhari Sikhs, now spread over many countries of the World, the Satguru has, step by step, led them into modernity in the best tradition of the soldier-saints of Punjab.*

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# Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji: the Spiritual Head of the Namdhari Sikhs

By S S Johar

**N**amdhari Sikhs are a sect of puritanical Sikhs who strictly observe the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. The sect was born out of a crusade launched by the founder of the sect, Satguru Ram Singh, as part of his programme of fighting against foreign rule as well as against the decadent Sikh aristocracy of the time following the passing away of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Satguru Ram Singh was born in 1816 on Basant Panchami Day, the spring festival, in Rayian in the Ludhiana district of Punjab, India. His father, Baba Jassa Singh, came from a middle class family, and Satguru Ram Singh started reading the hymns of the Sikh gurus and other saints as contained in the *Granth Sahib* from an early age.

Guru Ram Singh joined the Khalsa army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. While in his service, he had an occasion to visit Hazro in the north-west corner of the Sikh principality with his regiment, and it was while on that visit that he fell under the influence of Guru Balak Singh (1794-1862), a holy man whose noble example had won him the allegiance of a number of followers. Satguru Ram Singh became his disciple and dedicated himself to serving his mission. Guru Balak Singh later named Satguru Ram Singh as his successor.

While servicing in the Khalsa army, Satguru Ram Singh witnessed both its victories and its defeats. But at the beginning of the Anglo-Sikh war of 1845, Satguru Ram Singh foretold that the Khalsa army would suffer defeat and so he retired from service. He

*Property worth about 10,000 crores was left by Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan. Many devotees of Satguru Partap Singh also had to migrate to India. Satguru Ji founded a township, Jiwan Nagar at Sirsa, which is now a part of Haryana.*



returned to his village, Sri Bhaini Sahib, and took to ploughing the land. But his mind was not at peace and he underwent great spiritual turmoil.

After a while his old army companions began slowly trickling into Sri Bhaini Sahib, attracted by the charm of Satguru Ram Singh. It was during this period that a new concept of the Namdhari movement developed; the purpose of which became that of freeing the motherland from the yoke of foreign rule.

In 1857 Satguru Ram Singh founded what became known as Sant Khalsa,

Gopal Gandhi, the grandson of Mohandas Gandhi being presented to Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji

which later went on to form the nucleus of the Kuka Movement. Satguru Ram Singh set up an extensive agency for missionary work, appointing 22 *subas*, or governors.

In the year 1863 Satguru Ram Singh and his followers were placed under police surveillance. This act of official repression provided a shot in the arm for the movement, pushing it swiftly towards taking the form of a revolutionary organisation.





Pandit Birju Maharaj, Gurdev Singh and Surinder Singh being blessed by Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji

Satguru Ram Singh was forced to be detained in his village. A report sent to the central government on June 7 and 8 1863 by Captain Menzies, the Police Superintendent in Amritsar and Elphinstone, the Deputy Police Inspector General in Lahore, made the following comments regarding Satguru Ram Singh's activities: "Abolishes all distinctions of caste among Sikhs. Advocates indiscriminate inter-marriage of all classes. Engineers the marriage of widows, all of which he performs himself. He never takes alms himself, and prohibits his followers from doing so. Engineers abstinence from liquor and drugs and too much frequent intercourse between the sexes. He exhorts his disciples to be truth-telling."

In 1872, the confrontation between the British government and Satguru Ram Singh reached its peak. He was exiled and sent to Rangoon, where his

deep faith and the undiminished devotion of his followers sustained him in his solitary state for thirteen years.

After Satguru Ram Singh was sent into exile, Satguru Hari Singh ascended the *gaddi*. He was born in September 1819 and expired on May 17, 1906, after which Satguru Partap Singh became the new guru at the age of 16. Both of them carried forward the message of Satguru Ram Singh both in letter and in spirit and the number of their followers increased rapidly. The present guru, Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji, was born on November 22, 1920

in the house of Satguru Partap Singh and his mother Mata Bhupinder Kaur at Sri Bhaini Sahib in the district of

Ludhiana. At the time of his birth Sri Bhaini Sahib was under strict police surveillance and the police post was removed after the birth of the present guru, Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji in May 1923.

*While paying attention to the many religious, social and other problems confronting society, Satguru Jagjit Singh devotes himself wholeheartedly to encouraging and propagating Indian classical music both at home and abroad.*

Satguru Jagjit Singh received his early education at Sri Bhaini Sahib. He had basic training in Indian classical music in his childhood from Bhai Ram Singh and as his father Satguru Partap Singh was a lover of music and encouraged his son in his learning of music.

While paying attention to the many

religious, social and other problems confronting society, Satguru Jagjit Singh devotes himself wholeheartedly





to encouraging and propagating Indian classical music both at home and abroad. He has set up music schools at Mandi, Delhi, Jammu, Jalandhar and Ludhiana. In addition to these he has also set up Namdhari Kala Kendra, an apex body at Sri Bhaini Sahib, to propagate the learning of music and also to encourage both established and budding artists alike. Through promoting classical music, Satguru Jagjit Singh is giving practical shape to Sri Guru Nanak Dev's faith in music which led to say, "music is God's food". Satguru Jagjit Singh has been recognised as a great connoisseur and exponent of Indian music.

Satguru Jagjit Singh possesses an intellect which compares to any in this modern age. Since his early days he has personified sobriety and been a devoted symbol of humility.

Satguru Ji was married to Mata Rajinder Kaur, but after she died a year and a half later he was married for the second time to Mata Chand Kaur.

Following the partition of the coun-

try approximately a million people died during the aftermath of partition. Property worth over 10,000 crores was abandoned by Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan and many devotees of Satguru Partap Singh were forced to migrate to India. Satguru Ji then founded the township of Sri Jiwan Nagar at Sirsa, which is now a part of Haryana.

Satguru Jagjit Singh has travelled extensively, visiting England for the first time in 1967, and later visiting Germany for a cattle exhibition. When he visited Doctor Douglas Campbell Research Farm at Haughley, in the UK, he learned many new techniques for the rearing of cows. A news report of the time he visited Haughley reported: "East met west on a farmyard managed ground at Haughley when the spiritual leaders of 2.5 million Sikhs visited Haughley Research Farms".

Like his predecessors, Satguru Jagjit Singh is a great reformist. Their role in the independence movement was described by Khushwant Singh, who said: "Namdhari Sikhs have an hon-

**Tony Banks, the Minister for Sport in the British government, receiving the blessings of Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji**

oured place in the history of India's struggle for freedom", pointing out that they were the first to evolve Non-Cooperation and the use of *Swadeshi* as political weapons. As early as the 1860's they boycotted British goods, government-run schools, law courts and postal services, and they encouraged the wearing of hand-spun *khadi* sixty years before it was taken up by Mahatma Gandhi.

Namdhari Sikhs are true spiritual warriors who fight for the struggle of all humanity, striving to lead clean, simple and truthful lives under the able guidance of Satguru Jagjit Singh. The revolutionary concepts developed by Satguru Ram Singh are now being continued by Satguru Jagjit Singh, who adheres to the principle of giving respect to children's spiritual and physical personalities. Namdhari children are brought up with love, care and faith in order that they grow into upright and





Judge Mota Singh in conversation with Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji

clean persons who are healthy both in mind and body. He emphasises the sanctity and significance of the child and the mother in society which he says is wedded to spiritual freedom. Satguru Ji lays great stress on devotion to God, selfless service, and leading a pure and simple life.

Satguru Jagjit Singh is not only the spiritual head of the Namdhari Sikhs, giving spiritual sermons to his followers and admirers in India and abroad to uplift the mind and soul but he is also equally concerned for their material well-being as is manifest in his concern for the progress of farmers in increasing their output through scientific methods. As a pioneering effort, Satguru Ji acquired 176 acres of land in Urgahalli, 40 kilometres away from the city of Bangalore in Karnataka, to establish a seed farm way back in 1974.

Satguru Ji does not believe in spending lavishly in marriage and other such ceremonies. The marriages of Namdhari Sikhs are always simple

affairs where no gift or dowry is given. The bride simply places a woollen rosary of 108 beads around the bridegroom's neck to encourage him in a life of prayer. Neither the bride nor the bridegroom wears any jewellery.

The teachings of Satguru Jagjit Singh are simple: perform religious rituals to attain mental peace; do not think ill of others or harm fellow human beings or join the mad rush for material advantage, for some act as if happiness can be purchased if one has enough money. For

the Namdhari Sikhs this is an absolutely false notion. According to Namdhari teachings one can attain peace and happiness only through spiritual devotion. Namdharis believe that living beings belong to one family alone, and since they do not believe in transmigration of the soul they believe that people are all related to each another. They also pray for the welfare of all living creatures. They are influenced by books and pronouncements made by some which advocate pursuing the path of material gains alone because they side-track the spiritual and religious paths and end up following an irreligious and immoral course.

*Satguru Ji lays great stress on devotion to God, selfless service, and leading a pure and simple life*

It is considered the sacred duty of Namdhari Sikhs to protect livestock but also to offer food to a hungry person even if they had slaughtered a cow and were begging for food holding a sword dripping with cow's blood. If a Namdhari has two chapattis, they should donate at least a quarter to the poor and hungry. According to the Namdhari view, if a person donates a tenth of their hard-earned money they will be reimbursed many times over in one form or another. Above all, the Namdhari Sikhs believe that all religious unions are ultimately intended for the welfare of all living beings.

● S S Johar is a writer on religious and sociological matters.

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# ASIAN *affairs*

**FOCUS: INDEPENDENCE ISSUE**

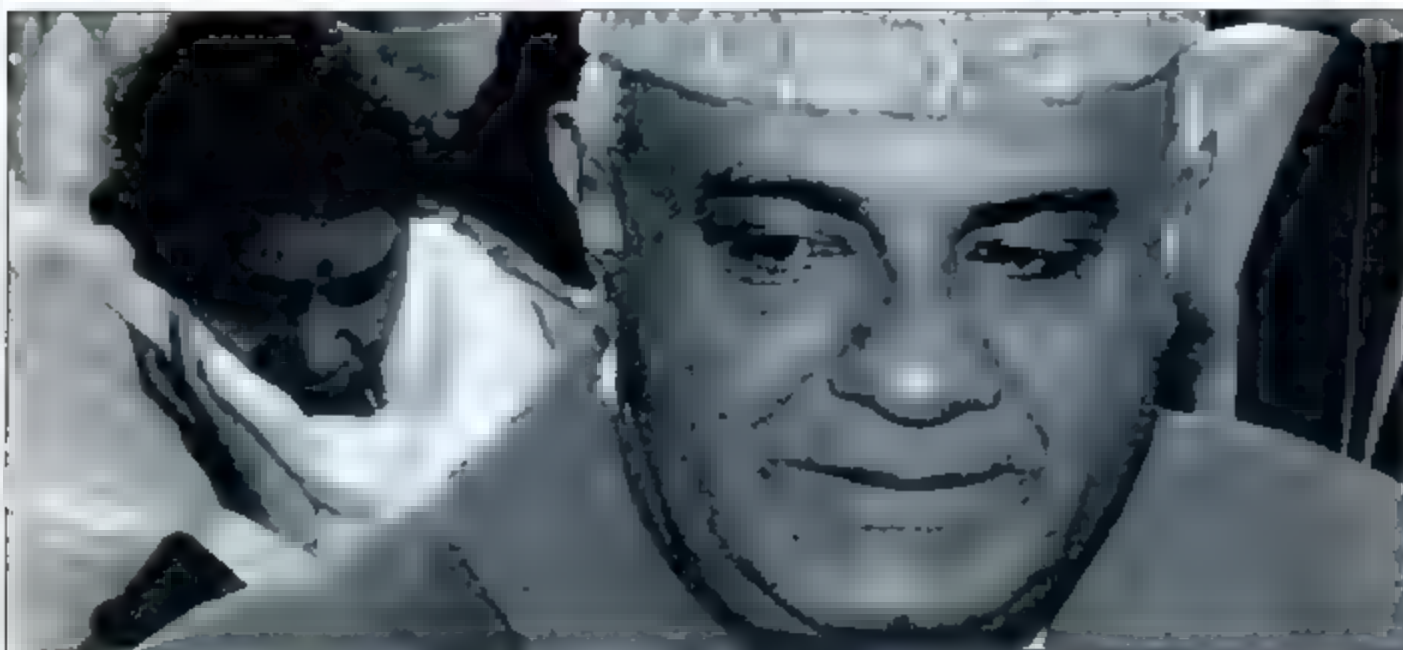
## **The Indian Subcontinent: 50 Years of Independence**



POPPIROTO







After fifty years as independent nations, we look at how the respective polities of the Indian subcontinent are faring. Raymond Whitaker looks at new developments towards regional co-operation in the form of the 'Gujral Doctrine', whilst Faraz Ahmed reports from New Delhi on how the UF government in India is progressing, with Harish Khare examining the constitutional features which have both conferred legitimacy to and sustained India's political system. Seema Mustafa reports on a developments in India where liberal Muslim opinion is becoming increasingly heard in political debate, and Zahid Hussain reports from Karachi on the hopes and challenges ahead facing the newly-elected government headed by Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League.

## SUPPLEMENT

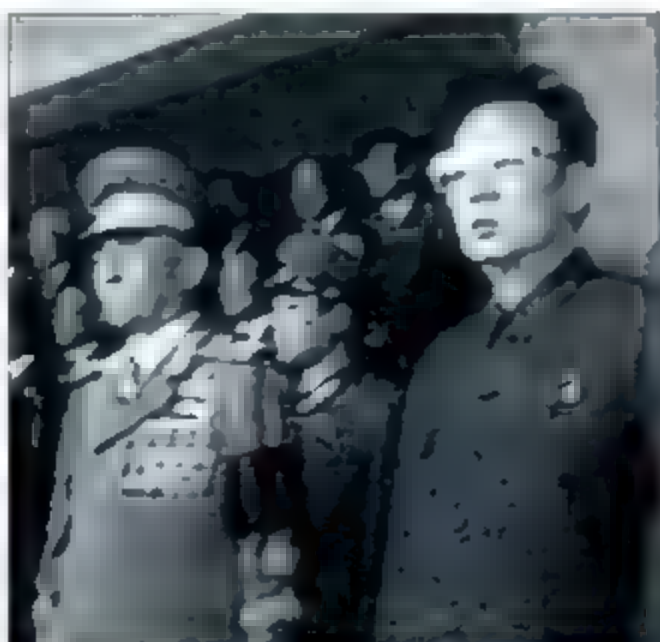
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In a special supplement to commemorate 50 years of independence, we look at the efforts of the brave individuals whose sacrifices were instrumental in gaining freedom for the peoples of the subcontinent and the political movements established during the years of colonial rule which played their part in the long journey towards independence.

## ASIA

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In the light of the recent defection of Hwang Jang-yop – the North Korean Communist Party's key ideologist – David Watts examines the future prospects for the world's first communist dynasty, and with only months remaining before the British leave Hong Hong, M G G Pillai looks back at the history of Europe's colonial presence in Asia.

## ASIA AND EUROPE

With Muslims forming the largest proportionate number of non-European immigrants in Western Europe, Rajendra K Jain examines patterns of migration in Europe as well as the impact of a 'clash of cultures' between Europeans and Muslim immigrants. He also examines the plight of immigrants in the light of a resurgence of racism in Western Europe, particularly in areas such as France where immigration from the Maghreb has seen growing support for racist parties such as Le Pen's National Front.



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# ASIANaffairs U.K. SPECIAL 50th Anniversary Issue



Illustration reproduced by kind permission of K S Bhambra

The Deportation of Satguru Ram Singh to Burma by the British in 1872

**T**HE INDEPENDENCE movement is most familiarly associated with Mahatma Gandhi and the crucial role played by the Congress Party in securing home rule for the peoples of the Indian subcontinent. Yet there are many individuals and movements who played their part in the struggle, as the process of opposing and protesting against British rule started long before 1947.

In this supplement Khushwant Singh writes on the role played by the Namdhari Sikhs in the struggle for independence, a role which goes back as far as 1872 when the Namdhari leader Satguru Ram Singh was exiled by the British. The Namdhari resistance techniques were to prove influen-

tial to Mahatma Gandhi and later the Indian National Congress, under his leadership, adopted the resistance tactics of *Swadeshi*, non-cooperation and boycott as devices of political protest.

The great pacifist movement inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and his principled adoption of the use of *Satyagraha* in the independence struggle proved to be both an ethical and an effective tool – a tool which Gandhi argued was more effective than the use of brute force or alternative forms of resistance, especially as a foil to the British Imperial policy of *divide et impera*, or 'divide and rule'.

But there were also those who advocated violent means, and who believed that it was only through the use of force that India could be liberated from

British rule. These too played their part in the independence struggle, and in this issue we look at the role of some of the leaders who advocated the use of force – Subhas Chandra Bose and Bhagat Singh amongst others.

There were those who became inspired by revolutionary ideology, and the Congress Party was even divided within its own ranks. But they were both means to the same end: the goal of independence. The two forms of protest were pursued side by side and both played their part in the struggle.

The peoples of the Indian subcontinent owe an immense debt of gratitude to all those who took part; from national leaders to the humblest peasant, and from every race, caste, creed and religion alike.



“Arise brothers, let us walk together to climb  
the minarets of freedom.  
Let the free India shine fully from all sides.”

*Let us celebrate the 50th year of Independence for the Indian Sub-Continent.*

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# The Namdhari Sikhs

By Khushwant Singh

**N**AMDHARI SIKHS have an honoured place in the history of India's struggle for freedom. They were the first to evolve non-cooperation and the use of *Swadeshi* as political weapons. As early as the 1860's they boycotted British goods, government schools, law courts and postal services. They emphasised the wearing of hand-spun *khadi* sixty years before it was taken up by Mahatma Gandhi.

The Namdharis are a body of puritanical Sikhs adhering strictly to the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. Their gurdwaras are not ostentatious and they do not indulge in the use of rich canopies or silk coverings for the *Granth Sahib* or any other ritual smacking of idolatry. They lead austere lives, wear the simplest of white *khaddar* cloths, wear no ornaments, save rosaries made of wool. Their marriages are performed without a fanfare of *barats*, bands and receptions and cost no more than Rs. 13 per nuptial performed. They are punctilious in attending services in their gurdwaras and in observing the taboos of food, drink and personal deportment: they are strict vegetarians, and totally abstain from the use of alcohol and tobacco.

The Namdhari Movement began in the N.W.F.P. in the last days of the Sikh rule as a protest against the licentious style of living of the Sikh aristocracy and assumptions of divinity made by the Bedi and Sodhi descendants of the Gurus. After the annexation of the

Panjab by the British, the Namdharis under the leadership of Satguru Ram Singh moved their headquarters to the village of Bhaini in Ludhiana district. It was Satguru Ram Singh who introduced changes in the forms of worship and address which distinguish his followers from the general body of Sikhs.



Like *sufi derveshis*, the Namdharis chanted hymns and often attained a state of *hal* or ecstasy when they emitted shrieks (*kooks*, hence the word *kooka* for Namdharis). They began to wear only spotless white *khadi* and retained their style of tur-

bans to original flat band across the forehead.

The Namdharis clashed with the British authorities on several encounters. Sixty-six of them were blown up by cannons and Satguru Ram Singh exiled to Burma in 1872.

Satguru Ram Singh was succeeded by his younger brother, Satguru Hari Singh, who was confined to his village Bhaini for all the years of his leadership of the sect and was succeeded by his son Satguru Pratap Singh (d. 1959). The present head of the Namdharis is Satguru Jagjit Singh. The Namdharis maintain two centres, one at Sri Bhaini Sahib, district Ludhiana and the other at Sri Jiwan Nagar in district Sirsa. They publish four journals. They are a close-knit community of farmers, artisans, contractors and cattle-breeders and businessmen now spread to distant corners of the globe.

● The veteran Indian journalist and author Khushwant Singh was formerly Editor of *The Hindustani Times* and *The Illustrated Weekly of India*.

## A Distinguished NRI



Somchai Chaisrichawla

In recognition of his outstanding services to the Indian community, Somchai Chaisrichawla has been awarded the 1996 Hind Rattan Award at the fourth convention of the NRI Welfare Society of India held in Bangkok, Thailand.

The son of an immigrant from the Punjab who established himself in the Thai textile industry, he was born and brought up in Bangkok, and joined the family business at the age of thirteen, later going on to establish OKI Industries and manufacture textile yarns.

Today he is one of Thailand's leading industrialists, with a vast business empire which branches into real estate under Ashoka Group as well as the travel industry, with Ashoka Travels and OKI Travels.

Amongst the community projects which Mr Chaisrichawla has sponsored in India is an agreement signed on 8th February 1995 with the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board to finance the Cavary Water Supply Scheme which will bring an additional 270 million litres of water a day to Bangalore.

Another scheme under way is the financing of a project to construct 120,000 residential units with a 15 year postponed payment arrangement for the immediate construction of the first 30,000 units. Through his continued support of such projects, Mr Chaisrichawla's work has set an example for other NRIs to follow.



# The Revolutionary Movement of the 1920s

**T**HE struggle for independence, along with forging a sense of nationhood, also represented the awakening of the people of India into the modern world. The impact of world history was felt and its lessons were interpreted in relation to the plight of India under colonial rule. The Declaration of Independence by the American colonists, the great French Revolution which proclaimed the ideals of liberty, fraternity and equality, the concept of sovereignty of the people, and ideas of socialism and the Bolshevik Revolution – all these influenced the people of India in their struggle for freedom and broadened their vision of a new India.

The struggle for freedom came to represent all the best and forward-looking features of the modern era in world history. The struggle against social evils, the awakening of the oppressed castes and the rise of peasants and workers against social oppression and inequalities all became an integral part of the freedom struggle.

This awareness led to an increasing acceptance of socialism as a solution to India's problems, as the independence movement was not merely a struggle for political freedom from foreign rule but a process of laying the foundations for building a new India.

The struggle produced a number of outstanding leaders. And whilst the greatest of these personalities was Gandhi, who led the first anti-imperialist mass struggle in 1920, there were those who followed other methods. The revolutionaries roused the people through their courage and played their own distinctive part in the struggle for freedom.

The disillusionment caused by the

suspension of the Non-Cooperation led to a renewal of revolutionary activities. Jogesh Chatterjee and Sachin Sanyal founded the Hindustan Republican Association, which proclaimed its aim of establishing a 'Federal Republic of United States of India' through armed revolution in its leaflet *Revolutionary*.

In order to raise funds for the HRA, Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqullah and others organised a train hold-up near Kakori station on the Lucknow-Saharanpur line in August 1925. Soon after the hold-up, several prominent members of the HRA were arrested and tried in the Kakori Conspiracy Case. While four members were found guilty and received the death sentence, Chandra Shekhar Azad managed to escape. Together with Bhagat Singh, the founder of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, they formed the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army in Delhi in September 1928.

The following year Bhagat Singh and B K Dutt were arrested and tried for a bomb attack on the Central Legislative Assembly to protest against the regressive Trade Disputes and Public Safety Bills and the arrest of various labour leaders earlier that year. They were tried and convicted for the Assembly Bomb Case as well as the Lahore Conspiracy Case.

Of the fifteen revolutionaries tried in the Lahore Conspiracy Case, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev were sentenced to death, while seven others were sentenced to deportation to a penal colony for life. Bhagat Singh and his comrades became legends in their own life times, and at the time of his execution, Bhagat Singh's popularity even rivalled that of Gandhi's.

Following a failed attempt to blow up the Viceroy's train in December

1929, the 'ever-elusive' Azad, who had previously escaped arrest, was killed in a shoot-out with the police in Allahabad. The HSRA revolutionaries led by Bhagat Singh had developed a clear socialist outlook. They had also realised the futility of terrorist methods and emphasised the necessity of organising peasants workers in order to bring about a socialist revolution. While sporadic acts of revolutionary terrorism by HSRA activists continued for some time, the revolutionaries generally gave up terrorist methods in favour of building up mass organisations of workers and peasants. The revolutionary trend continued mainly in Bengal and there, too, it came to an end by the early 1930's.



Bhagat Singh

## 'Lenin Day' in Lahore Court:

Excerpts from a news item on the court proceedings during the Lahore Conspiracy Case, which appeared in the *Hindustan Times* of 26 January 1930:

Before proceedings commenced today in the Lahore Conspiracy Case, all the eighteen accused who entered the Court room with red scarves round their necks took their seats in the dock amidst shouts of 'Long Live the



Revolution', 'Long Live the Communist International', 'Long Live Lenin', 'Long Live the Proletariat' and 'Down, Down with Imperialism'.

Bhagat Singh informed the Magistrate that he and his fellow accused were celebrating the day as Lenin Day and requested him to convey the following message to the President, Third International in Moscow at their cost. The message runs: "On the occasion of the Lenin Day we express brotherly congratulations on the triumphant march of Comrade Lenin's mission. We wish every success for the great experiment carried on in Soviet Russia. We wish to associate ourselves with the world revolution movement. Victory to the Workers' Regiment. Woe to the Capitalists. Down with Imperialism..."

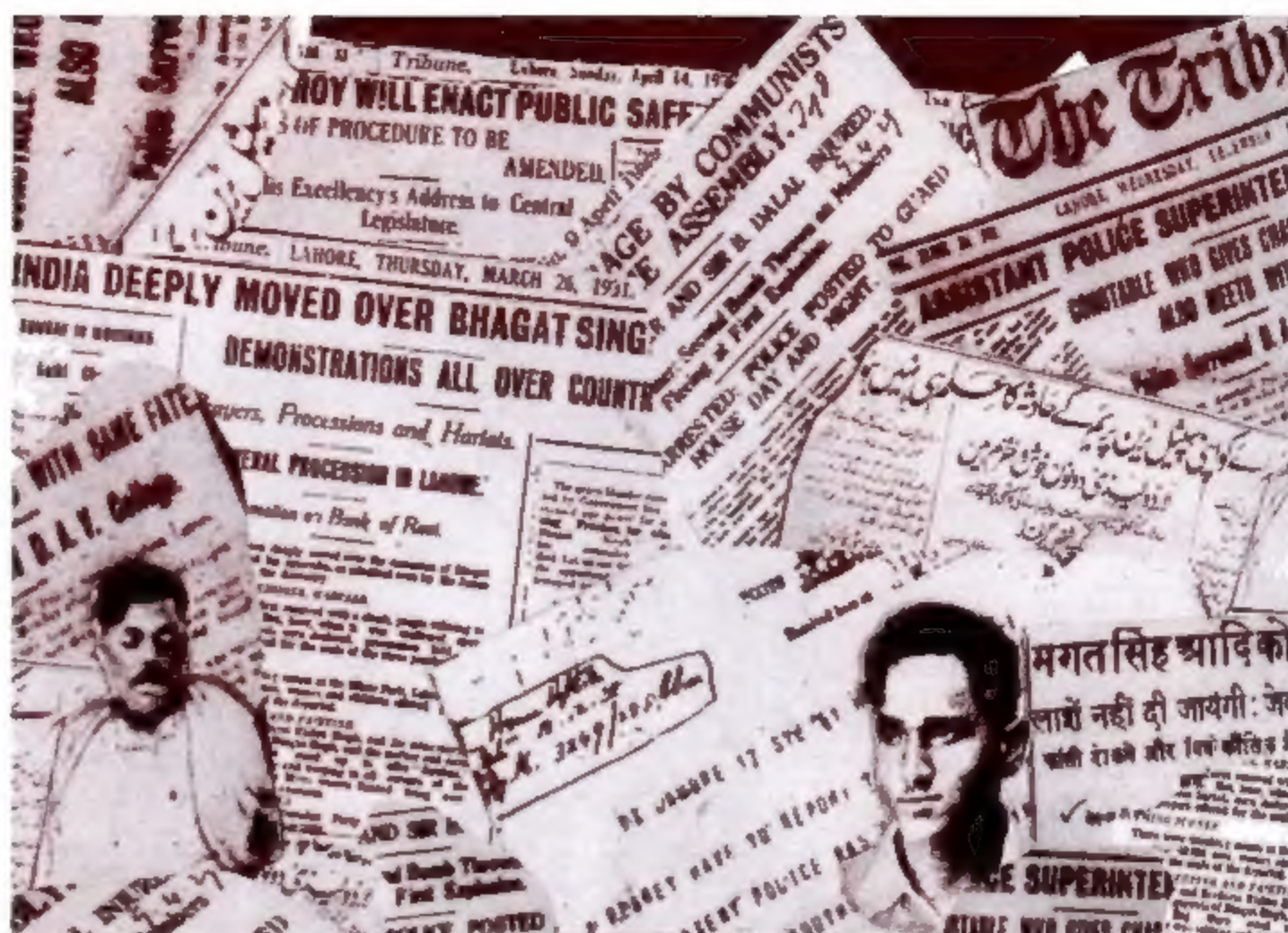
### Ajoy Ghosh on Chandra Shekhar Azad:

A pen picture of Chandra Shekhar Azad drawn by Ajoy Ghosh, a fellow-revolutionary who later became a leader of the Communist Party of India:

For the youth that were drawn into the terrorist movement in the thirties the name of Chandra Shekhar Azad was at once a legend and an inspiration.

A participant in the Kakori train action in 1925, Azad escaped arrest during the round-up that followed. With gallows staring him in the face if he got caught, he was not, however, the man to lie low even for a day. A great organiser, he continued his work with redoubled energy and together with Bhagat Singh and Sukhdeo rebuilt the Party.

In many respects he was a striking contrast to Bhagat Singh. Calm and collected – most so when leading armed actions – never perturbed, never upset, Azad had nerves of iron. He had none of the impetuosity of Baghat Singh, nor his breadth of vision and intellectual attainments. Not having had much opportunity for study, he was slow to grasp the new ideas that were entering our ranks...



Robust and steady, he had muscles of iron and phenomenal strength and agility. On top of it all he was a crack shot, the best in our Party. No wonder therefore that his name sent shivers down the spine of police officials in the Punjab, U.P. and Bihar – the provinces where he operated. No man, not even Bhagat Singh, evoked such terror in their minds.

None should think, however, that he



Chandra Shekhar Azad

was...a monster thirsting for blood, as the terror-stricken police sought to make out...he was not merely respected but loved by all who knew him. A strict disciplinarian, he spared neither himself nor others for slackness...But seldom was he unjust.

And, above all, he inspired such confidence that one felt that an action which Azad undertook was bound to succeed...

Despite the self-sacrificing efforts

made by him and his comrades...the national movement had not moved into revolutionary channels...All this had made Azad think hard and long. It was not that his faith in terrorism had been completely shattered. But clearly something was wrong with the notion that a band of heroic and self-sacrificing youths could...influence the national movement as a whole in a revolutionary direction...Azad's own view was that as many comrades as possible should now go in for mass work and organise the workers and peasants to develop a mass Socialist movement leaving him and a few others to resort to armed action only when the needs of that movement demanded it and to train cadres in the use of arms for the future revolutionary uprising.

It was on this basis that Azad wanted to rebuild the party but he did not live to carry out his plan. Thanks to the information supplied by a traitor he was surprised by a police force in the Alfred Park of Allahabad and after a prolonged exchange of shots during which two police officials were seriously wounded Azad was killed. Thus ended the eventful life of a man whose indomitable courage and iron will had made him a legendary figure in the whole of Northern India.





Former Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru with Satguru Partap Singh Ji

**"No Indian can deny the importance of efforts put  
in by Satguru Ram Singh and his followers, Namdhari Sikhs,  
seventy five years ago in achieving the freedom of the country.**

**Congress merely followed the path shown by  
them and attained independence."**

Jawaharlal Nehru,

The first Prime Minister of Independent India.

**We wish to extend our homage to the heroes who  
fought in the struggle to achieve independence  
for countries of the Indian Subcontinent.**

**Rajinder Singh Chana**

President

**NAMDHARI SANGAT U.K.**

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